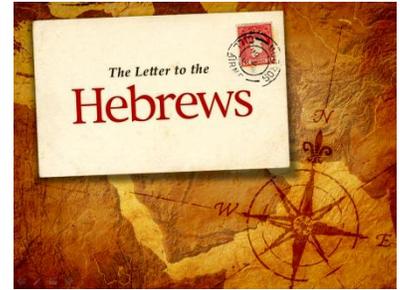


CONTEXT, CONTEXT, CONTEXT

1. Hebrews 11:1-3. *Faith is the evidence of expected certainty*. Unfortunately, faith in our culture is too often a synonym for irrational belief. When examined more closely, however, we see faith is a synonym for trust in an assumed truth.

For example, in geometry we assume the reality of a “straight line,” even though by definition a *straight* line does not exist. It’s scientific & pragmatic value, however, is that assuming (i.e., “having faith in”) a straight line exists... allows us to make exquisite statements about area and volume. Similarly, there is no perfect arc, yet the presumption of π^2 allows us to draw superb conclusions about circles and spheres.



Similarly, we assume God is (i.e., we trust in the expected certainty He is). By assuming God is, we understand more. For example, we are able to explain the question of *primus movatur* (Who/what created the universe?). Otherwise, we are confronted with an existence that is self-existent, an hypothesis unacceptable to believer and unbeliever alike.⁵³

So, the believer assumes God is, and by doing so, can become more sure about our reasonable expectations. Furthermore, we can see why our forbearers, even if not especially with their weaknesses, were God-commended. It is through this faith/assumption we understand the universe was formed by God’s command—what is seen is not made out of what was or is visible.

2. Hebrews 11:4-12. *Proof of faith in action—Abel to Abraham*. Let us consider the reality in the lives of people who relied upon the Lord Gods’ faithfulness.

Remember—it is impossible to delight God without faith. In fact, anyone who comes to God must believe God exists, and believe God rewards those who sincerely seek Him.

From one man’s faith, who initially had no hope of a legacy of descendants, became not only the father of innumerable people, but also the spiritual father of all who are *ev* Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-29).

3. Hebrews 11:13-22. *Faith is future focused*. Even though these examples were still living by faith when they died, all saw their reward in the future. They recognized they were sojourning aliens on earth—all were longing for a better country, a heavenly land in which to live.
4. Hebrews 11:23-31. *Faith distinguishes, whether holy man or whore*. Faith caused Moses’ parents to hide him to protect him from pharaoh’s edict of death. And when Moses grew up, it was faith which caused him to reject being called a son of Egypt. He chose to be mistreated, rather than enjoy the

⁵³This untenable hypothesis accounts for the popularity and the reason behind Descartes’ conclusion, “I think, therefore I am” (intriguingly enough using the name of God to justify and evince existence; cf., Exodus 3:14, Matthew 16:15, and especially John 8:58). Porter extended Descartes’ idea by advancing the next proposition—“I communicate to prove I am” (D. Thomas Porter, *A Cauffective Model of Interpersonal Sequencing: An Ontologically Based Conception of Communication*, International Communication Association, Dublin, Ireland, 1990). Thus, Porter argues that human reality is proven by our use of symbolic and quasi-symbolic behavior. Especially when pressed, then, humanity will engage in “communicative” behavior to reify its existence, whether conceived corporately or individually.

pleasures of sin. It was by faith Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies of God; she was not killed with all those who were disobediently unbelieving.

Hebrews 11:32-40. *Faith does great things with ordinary people.* There's not enough time to detail all of the great things done by Gideon, Barak (Deborah), Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets. It was through faith these ordinary people did extraordinary things and became more than ordinary people. Mouths of lions were shut, kingdoms were conquered, flames were quenched, swords were dulled, weakness became strength, and God's enemies were thwarted.

12:1-6. *Heroes of the faith are watching—get rid of all the skybola—run the race, dude!* There is a great number of people watching us—so let us throw off anything which hinders us from doing what we're called to do. Win the race!

If we're going to win, we must also run with perseverance—keeping our eyes on the Lord Jesus who gave us and completed our faith! He put off the joy as the Christ; He endured the cross—ignoring its shame, and then... **He sat down.** He sat down on right hand at the throne of Father God. When you are opposed by sinful people—consider Jesus; He endured such opposition. Do this and you will get less tired—nor will you lose your bearings.

In your struggle against being distanced from the Lord God, you have yet to lose blood. If you have to, remember Scripture says,

Hey! Don't ignore nor diminish the Lord God's discipline in your life. Don't lose heart when God reprimands you. The Lord God Jehovah disciplines those He loves; He even punishes everyone He accepts as His child.

HEBREWS 12:1-6

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. ⁴In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." [Proverbs 3:11-12]

- Q Who are the witnesses in your cloud which spur you on to finish the race the Lord God has set before you? Which witnesses in this cloud do you try to ignore? Should ignore?
- Q With which entanglements are you have the most trouble throwing off?
- Q What is the race which has been set before you? Characterize it—marathon or sprint, solo or relay? If a relay, what is the baton? Which baton has been dropped in your history of running this race? By whom? Why?
- Q Who else let their eyes drift away from Jesus? And the consequences? [Matthew 14:25-33]
- Q What was the shame of the cross Jesus the Christ exchanged for the joy of being Christ in heaven?
- Q How did the Christ overcome this shame, this sense of injustice? Implications for us?
- Q How has discipline improved your lot in life? And how has the absence thereof affected your life?

Hebrews 12:7-13. *Learning to accept, if not relish, discipline is the threshold which distinguishes Homo sapiens from human.* Hardship is part of life, and as such, should be endured as discipline. When you endure hardship, you are given the opportunity to experience God's affection, for what child is not disciplined by their parent? Otherwise, you are considered bastards, not true offspring of your parents.

Consider your human parents—their discipline, with retrospection, often garnered your respect. When Father God disciplines, however, you know there is a reason and an outcome which will help you persevere. His discipline allows us to share His holiness; our parents' discipline was temporary and imperfect.

Of course, discipline feels awful at the time, even painful. But later on, such Godly discipline leads to a harvest of righteousness, and peace for those who have been trained by it.

So what? Strengthen the arms by which you do God's work. Strengthen the knees which bend when praying, and flex when running. Running to the One on whose eyes you've fixed needs bent, yet flexible knees, strong but well-directed arms. Why? Remember the old advice—make level paths; such paths do not injure, but heal the disabled.

- Q What disciplinary efforts by your parents did/do you find the most troubling? Which, if any, have turned out to be useful, spiritually and/or pragmatically?
- Q What disciplinary efforts by the Lord God did/do you find the most troubling? Which, if any, have turned out to be useful, spiritually and/or pragmatically?
- Q What makes discipline unpleasant and/or painful? Pleasant and/or pleasurable? What role does "submission" play in all this? (see verse 9)

HEBREWS 12:7-13

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹²Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³"Make level paths for your feet," [Proverbs 4:26] so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

- Q About what is this “harvest of righteousness” and “harvest of peace”⁵⁴ the writer is speaking?
- Q A question for runners... What is the value of cross-country running versus track running? Which requires more discipline? Which is more valuable to completing the ultimate race spoken of in verses 1-2? Note the witnesses below...



⁵⁴Remember there are at least four kinds of peace. Understanding the kind of peace Holy Spirit is speaking about is key; to wit,

- A. *pax*—the Latin word designating the absence of conflict. Peace is making sure the two parties do not war against each other as in “do war no more.” As in a cease fire between Russia & Ukraine.
- B. εἰρηνην (ayray’ nayn)—the Greek word for equilibrium; i.e., putting things back the way they were. Peace is reconciling two parties to a previous state of balance and harmony, as in “now you give your brother back his toy.” (cf., Hebrews 12:11) As in an agreement to return Ukraine’s territory and sovereignty.
- C. *islam*—the Arabic word for peace through submission. Peace is ensuring that all submit to the sovereign authority, as in “... a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron scepter...” (Revelation 19:5, referring to the Christ). As in Ukraine will become controlled by Russia and will not rebel.
- D. *shalom*—the Hebrew word designating a sense of holistic well-being. Peace is having everything together in its right place, both spiritual and material. Robert Browning’s sarcastic comment, “God is in His heaven and all is right with the world” was used to illustrate shalom, specifically the ironic lack thereof. Russia feels more secure, economically and politically and/or Ukraine has its sense of well-being back.

Hebrews 12:14-29. *Time to do righteously, not just think righteously*. So, work hard to live in peace with all people; be set apart with the holiness that comes from Holy Spirit—because without that, no one will see the Lord God. Make sure no one misunderstands the gift of God; make sure no bitterness causes even more trouble, defiling many. Make sure not one is sexually immoral, godless like Esau—after all, he sold his inheritance for a bowl of beans. As you know, when he wanted to get his inheritance, he was rejected nor could a change happen, though he came to Daddy Isaac with tears.

You've not encountered a mountain that can be touched that's burning; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking that those who've heard beg to hear no more. They could not bear what was commanded... "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." God is indeed holy, even the mountain on which He came to visit humankind. After all, even Moses said he was trembling with fear.

BUT, you have arrived at the New Jerusalem—the city of the Living Lord God. You've come to thousands on top of thousands of angels all joyfully gathered. You've come to the called out of the first born, those whose names are written in heaven. You have come the Lord God Almighty, the judge of all people, and to the spirits of good righteous men made perfect. You've come to Yeshua the mediator of ["a" is not there] new covenant, a covenant sprinkled with the blood that surpasses the first blood of Abel.

So, see to it you don't refuse him who speaks. If *they* did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we—if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? Then his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised:

*Once more I will shake not only the earth,
but also the heavens.* [Haggai 2:6]

Ergo, since we are getting a kingdom that cannot be disturbed, let us thank and worship the Lord God, acceptably, reverently and with awe. Remember our *God is a consuming fire.* [Deuteronomy 4:24]

- Q Why do you suppose the writer shifted here from theological analyses to orthopraxic pragmatics?
- Q How would you describe the significance of this terrifying mountain to an unbeliever? Verses 18-21
- Q Why did the writer use the blood of Abel as a contrast to the blood of the Christ?

HEBREW 12:14-29

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. ¹⁵ See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. ¹⁶ See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son.

¹⁷ Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

¹⁸ You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; ¹⁹ to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, ²⁰ because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." [Exodus 19:12,13] ²¹ The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." [Deut 9:19]

²² But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, ²³ to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, ²⁴ to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? ²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." [Haggai 2:6]

²⁷ The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain.

²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ²⁹ for our "God is a consuming fire." [Deut 4:24]

- Q How would you describe the significance of this new city to an unbeliever? Verses 22-24
- Q Who is "him" in verses 24-26?
- Q What's the problem, perhaps, of the translation of verse 24? Definite vs. indefinite articles.
- Q Just how do we worship with "reverence and awe?"
- Q And, the "consuming fire," just what is that all about?